

Update on Flu Vaccine Situation

On October 5, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it had been informed by the Chiron Corporation that none of Chiron's flu vaccine, Fluvirin, would be available for the 2004-2005 flu season. Chiron produces approximately one-half of the 100 million doses of flu vaccine CDC had arranged for this season.

On December 7th, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced that the United States would be acquiring from Germany 1.2 million new doses of flu vaccine produced by drug maker GlaxoSmithKline. The doses are being approved under a so-called investigational new drug (IND) application, which allows for expedited approval in certain cases. These doses of flu vaccine are not experimental and are currently being used by patients in other countries.

The additional vaccine will be distributed by CDC with priority going to those areas of the country with the greatest shortage. Congressman Brown has worked with officials from FDA and the City of Cleveland to try and secure additional doses of vaccine from Canada, as well as to make the CDC aware of the level of need in Northeast Ohio.

Because of this shortage, CDC has issued the following recommendations with regards to the flu vaccine.

Priority Groups for Influenza Vaccination

The following priority groups for vaccination with inactivated influenza vaccine this season are considered to be of equal importance and are:

- All children aged 6–23 months;
- Adults aged 65 years and older;
- Persons aged 2–64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions;
- All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season;
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;
- Children aged 6 months–18 years on chronic aspirin therapy;
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care; and
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged <6 months.

Vaccination of Persons in Nonpriority Groups

Persons who are not included in a priority group are being asked to forego or defer vaccination.

Persons Who Should Not Receive Influenza Vaccine

Persons in the following groups should not receive influenza vaccine before talking with their doctor:

- Persons with a severe allergy (i.e., anaphylactic allergic reaction) to hens' eggs
- Persons who previously had onset of Guillain-Barré syndrome during the 6 weeks after receiving influenza vaccine

Flu Activity Update

As of the week of December 4th, CDC described flu activity for Ohio as Sporadic. This means there have been few cases of influenza reported. It does not look as if this shortage will affect the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) ability to ship vaccine to public health providers. It is important to keep in mind that in any given year, public health departments provide only about 10 percent to 20 percent of the influenza vaccine distributed. ODH does not provide vaccine to private health care providers.

It is essential that Congress work to ensure an adequate supply of flu vaccine every year in the future. This will require an effort to diversify the production of vaccine and solidify the market in order to ensure that our supply rests in the hands of more than just two manufacturers. During the 109th Congress, I will work with my colleagues on an effective long-term strategy to prevent future shortages

As the flu season progresses, please check back to my website (www.house.gov/sherrodbrown) or call my office (800-234-6413) for updates. You may also wish to periodically check the CDC website (www.cdc.gov) and/or the Ohio Department of Health website (www.odh.state.oh.us).